

Dog Ban Repealed; Permits and Leashes Required

By SUSANNA SHEEHAN

Just before the April 1 deadline, the dog ban on Duxbury beach has been lifted.

Duxbury selectmen unanimously approved repealing the ban they instituted last December. They followed the recommendation of the Beach Access Rights Committee (BARC) and the beach owners, Duxbury Beach Reservation Inc., to allow dogs on the beach during the summer as long as their owners obtain free permits and keep their dogs leashed at all times.

In December, selectmen approved a ban on dogs from the entire beach from April 1 to August 31 at the request of the Reservation. This action was in response to state officials who wanted better protection for an endangered bird, the piping plover, after two chicks were killed last summer.

Residents opposing the ban formed BARC and met with the Reservation's Beach Technical Committee to hammer out a compromise that will let the dogs stay on the beach during the summer. BARC supporters circulated a petition that drew almost 1,600 signatures from people opposing the ban.

The repeal of the ban is based on new rules that are in addition to the other beach regulations.

All dogs must be leashed and under the immediate effective control of its handler. The harbormasters will determine what constitutes "immediate effective control."

To have a dog on the beach, an owner must register with the town and obtain a free permit, which must be carried by the dog's handler at all times while on the beach. The permit requires dog owners give their names, addresses, and the breed, color and license of their dogs. All dogs must be licensed before an owner can receive a permit.

The permits will be available at the town hall switchboard between 8 am to 3:45 pm. Dog owners must show identification.

Other rules specify that dogs can only be on the beach from 8 am to sunset. They and their handlers are not allowed in any

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protected or fenced area of the beach. Also, the previous regulations prohibiting dogs from the front resident beach and the back beach from May 1 through September 15 are still in effect. For sanitary reasons, dogs are not permitted on the front beach except in the 4x4 area. They are also prevented from being on the back beach north to the Powder Point Bridge adjacent to the resident parking lot. These rules were instituted a few years ago.

If anyone violates the new rules governing dogs, the harbormaster's office can issue fines and revoke permits for the rest of the season. The Harbormaster can use non-criminal disposition to issue fines from \$25 to \$200. If a dog permit is revoked, it will be recorded at the town hall and the permit holder and immediate family members cannot re-apply for another until the next year.

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Art Vautrinot of the Duxbury Beach Reservation said the dog permits have received approval from the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program. It was this organization and the US Fish and Wildlife Service that wanted the Reservation to provide better protection for the ten to 12 piping plover pairs that nest and raise their young each summer on Duxbury beach. This recommendation came after two plover chicks were killed by a vehicle one night last summer after police closed the beach to search for a woman whom they thought had drowned.

Vautrinot said the Reservation approved the dog permit

system but could not pay for any costs associated with it. Also, he warned that the Reservation could re-institute the ban at any time if it felt the regulations were not being followed.

"If people follow the rules, there should be no problem," said Vautrinot.

Harbormaster Don Beers said his department could handle the permit enforcement and would also offer permits at his headquarters before and after regular town hall hours. Also, his department will post new signs at the beach about the dog permits.

Town Manager Rocco Longo said the town had enough money in its budget to pay for the cost of the dog permits, but in the future, a fee may be charged.

"It's a trial for us," Longo said.

Selectmen Chairman Andre Martecchini commended the BARC group for finding a solution that worked for everyone involved.

"This was an opportunity for people to do something," said Martecchini. "Instead of just complain, you did something about it. There is a way to make things happen in town government and that is by working cooperatively."

Martecchini said that to make the plan work, dog owners and others have to enforce the rules: "It's important that people go up to people who are not obeying the rules and say you're going to spoil it for everyone," he said.